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Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6430th meeting

Tuesday, 23 November 2010, 10.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Sir Mark Lyall Grant	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Čolaković
	Brazil	Mrs. Dunlop
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Moungara Moussotsi
	Japan	Mr. Kodama
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Mugoya
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Pascoe: We are in the midst of a delicate period that will determine whether a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is possible. The continued diplomatic impasse since the moratorium on settlement construction ended on 26 September is worrying. We believe that a return to talks is crucially important. Efforts are continuing to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu met with United States Secretary of State Clinton on 11 November. Discussions between the United States and the parties are ongoing.

There have also been consultations in the region to support those efforts. The League of Arab States Follow-up Committee of the Arab Peace Initiative deferred its meeting agreed upon in Sirte to allow more time for diplomatic efforts. Senior Egyptian interlocutors met with President Abbas in Ramallah on 29 October, and subsequently with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 5 November. On 20 November, President Abbas met with President Mubarak in Cairo and with League of Arab States Secretary-General Amr Moussa for discussions. United States efforts to re-start negotiations have reached a critical phase. It is essential that the parties engage seriously and make substantive progress quickly once the talks resume, with a view to resolving all permanent status issues. Quartet envoys have been in regular contact. We support a Quartet meeting soon to help move the process forward.

There has been significant construction in a number of settlements since the expiry of the partial settlement moratorium. There have also been announcements of plans to construct 1,300 settlement units in the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem, 32 units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev, as part of a plan to expand it by a further 220 units, and a further 800 units in the Ariel settlement, deep inside the West Bank. In his letter (S/2010/578) of 10 November to the President of the Security Council, the Permanent Observer of Palestine raised concerns about the impact of this renewed settlement activity on the prospects for talks.

The Secretary-General expressed his concern about these developments to Prime Minister Netanyahu when they met in New York on 8 November. We call on Israel to fulfil its Road Map obligation to freeze illegal settlement construction and not to implement plans for additional settlement units. In its 21 September statement, the Quartet recalled that unilateral actions taken by either party cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community. Previously, the Quartet had also reiterated that the annexation of East Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community and that the status of Jerusalem is a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.

The Palestinian Authority's State-building agenda continues to advance steadily, in accordance with Prime Minister Fayyad's strategy. However, the strategy requires adequate and sustainable financial backing. The recent and welcome support from donors has improved the Palestinian Authority's liquidity situation over the past month. However, the United Nations urges Member States to find additional resources to address outstanding shortfalls.

During the reporting period there was a decline in the number of violent incidents recorded in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces continued to maintain law and order and to fight extremism in accordance with Palestinian Road Map obligations. Security forces uncovered a significant arms cache in Ramallah on 22 October. A number of militants were also arrested during the reporting period, including a leader of

Islamic Jihad. A cell of Hamas militants was arrested by Palestinian security forces in Ramallah on 17 November.

International efforts to improve the capacity and strength of Palestinian security forces continue. A sixth battalion of Palestinian national security forces completed its training in Jordan on 10 November and will soon be deployed in the West Bank.

During the reporting period, Israeli security forces conducted 371 operations in the West Bank, in which 87 Palestinians were injured and 211 arrested, while four Israeli security personnel were injured. Those detained by Israel included Palestinians in possession of arms and members of the Hamas political wing, including the Secretary of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

There were 15 attacks by Palestinians on Israeli settlers, which resulted in injuries to four Israelis. On 30 October, shots were fired at an Israeli vehicle travelling near the village of Al-Walaja, north-west of Bethlehem.

The olive harvesting season took place during the reporting period. Attacks by Israeli settlers, including arson, the uprooting of thousands of olive trees belonging to Palestinians, vandalism and theft of agricultural equipment and crops, were reported on an almost daily basis, and in greater numbers than in the two previous olive harvests. On 22 October, Israeli settlers desecrated a Palestinian cemetery on the outskirts of the West Bank village of Kfar Kadum. There were 29 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians or their property, in which 14 Palestinians were injured.

The construction on the barrier continues, with deviations from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank has remained constant in recent months, at approximately 508.

While recognizing the Israeli Government's legitimate security concerns, it is important that international organizations and their staff are given greater access to the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza to implement effectively their assistance projects. In that regard, we are concerned that there may be deterioration in access between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank as a result of the proposed changes to the administration of the crossings.

In East Jerusalem, the situation in the Silwan neighbourhood, adjacent to the Old City, is tense. There have been continued confrontations between settlers and Palestinian residents. On 25 October, eviction orders were handed out to eight families living in Silwan. That led to violent clashes in which a Palestinian child was seriously injured by a rubber bullet.

The humanitarian community finalized its consolidated appeal for 2011, in full consultation with the Palestinian Authority. The appeal, which will be presented in Brussels on 30 November, articulates specific humanitarian strategies to address critical needs in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We urge generous donors to support the consolidated appeal fully in order to prevent further deterioration in living conditions, especially in areas beyond Palestinian Authority control. Residents in Gaza and Area C of the West Bank remain among the most vulnerable.

I shall now turn to the situation in Gaza. During the reporting period, Palestinian militant groups fired eight rockets, including two Grad rockets, and 41 mortars from Gaza into Israel. Israeli security forces conducted 10 air strikes and 23 incursions into the Strip. Four Palestinian militants were killed, including three who died in targeted killings carried out by Israeli security forces. Without prejudice to Israel's right to legitimate and proportionate self-defence, we reiterate our consistent opposition to extra-judicial killing. Twenty civilians were injured during the reporting period, 12 of whom were injured collecting rubble in the restricted area along the perimeter fence. Three Palestinians died in accidents while working in smuggling tunnels. In a worrying escalation, Palestinian militant groups fired four phosphorus mortar shells into Israel on 19 November. Israel subsequently conducted three air strikes against tunnels along the Rafah crossing and a militant training facility. We continue to condemn rocket fire, which indiscriminately endangers civilians, and which must cease. We urge all parties to show calm and restraint and respect international humanitarian law.

On 21 October, a large explosion near Rafah resulted in more than 12 injured Palestinian civilians and extensive material damage. Hamas subsequently

admitted that the explosion was an accident that took place inside a training facility for its militants. On 10 November, a land-to-sea missile was test-fired by Palestinian militants over a densely populated Palestinian neighbourhood of Gaza. I reiterate my deep concern about all armed activity that puts civilians in danger or is aimed at civilian populations.

The priority of the United Nations remains the rebuilding of a viable Gazan economy in the framework of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). That will take time, but there are a range of important steps that can begin the process, namely, the resumption of exports, the free movement of people into and out of Gaza and the return of the Palestinian Authority to the crossings. All of these represent achievable steps that are fundamental to Gaza's long-term recovery. Access to agricultural land along the Gaza border and to fishing areas, which are currently prohibited, are important elements for economic recovery, together with revival of the construction industry, with multiplier effects across all sectors.

The Israeli Government's 20 June decision on Gaza was a welcome and positive step, but it has not yet been fully translated into practice. The United Nations continues to work both to expand the flow of its reconstruction work in the Gaza Strip and to increase that work's pace of implementation. Both the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have now received written Israeli approval for the implementation of programmes of work worth approximately $80 million. However, approval and implementation procedures remain slow and bureaucratic. Capacity at the crossings is critical. As noted in the last Security Council briefing (see S/PV.6404), the United Nations remains concerned about capacity at the Karni crossing for the entry of aggregate and essential wheat grain. We call on Israel to facilitate the timely entry of construction materials for the implementation of approved United Nations work and to allow the Organization's agencies to continue to expand the flow of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

During this reporting period there was an increase in the weekly number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip, to 1,026, up from 940 in the previous reporting period, and from 566 in June, before the announcement of the new Israeli measures. However, the total number is still short of the 2,800 that were entering Gaza weekly in June 2007.

The water and sanitation situation in Gaza remains dire. Funding amounting to $15 million has been secured for the UNDP Khan Younis wastewater project, which was approved in March. I appeal to donors to assist in funding the outstanding $40 million needed for the project to be implemented.

The Rafah crossing continues to remain open for humanitarian passage to Egypt. I note that there was good cooperation between all of the relevant bodies in enabling the departure of pilgrims from Gaza for the annual hajj to Mecca.

Representatives of Fatah and Hamas met in Damascus on 9 November for further discussions on Palestinian reconciliation. Reports indicate that the meeting was inconclusive. We continue to support efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The date of 11 November marked 1,600 days since the capture of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit. We reiterate our call for his immediate release. Humanitarian access to him should be granted without conditions. There has been no apparent progress on the efforts to complete a prisoner exchange for some of the 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained stable, although settlement activity continues. On 2 November, the Israeli Government encouraged further settlement activity through the announcement of an initiative to give 140 one-dunum plots of land free to Israeli settlers in order to build further units. Also, legislation was passed yesterday in the Knesset requiring a two-thirds majority or, failing that, a national referendum to approve the return of any occupied territory in East Jerusalem or the Syrian Golan in the context of any political settlement.

I will not cover the situation in Lebanon in this briefing, as it was addressed in the Council in detail last week by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Mr. Michael Williams, and Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Atul Khare, when they presented the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2010/565) on the state of implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

In the period ahead, we must work to bring about a return to direct talks between the parties and to support an atmosphere on the ground conducive to quick and concrete progress in those talks, including a freeze on settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas must show vision and leadership, rise above their domestic constraints and seize this opportunity to secure a historic and lasting peace. The Secretary-General remains committed to working with the parties and his international partners for an end to the occupation that began in 1967, for the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the matter.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.